

Appendix II - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Christ Jesus, Our Hope – Diocesan Strategic Planning for Parishes

1. Why does the Church need to restructure?

Restructuring at this time is due to a series of factors that have been affecting the ability of the church to live out her mission most effectively. These factors include demographic shifts, small and large, from the migration of many Catholics away from the Northeast to changes in ethnic groups within certain neighborhoods. As neighborhoods change, the church must adapt. The deterioration and delayed maintenance of many of our churches is also a factor that must be taken into consideration. The decline in the number of priests available to serve the parishes must also be considered. Finally, the financial distress in parishes compounded by the recent economic recession is also a factor.

2. Is this just a plan to close parishes?

Not at all. *Christ Jesus, Our Hope* is a major diocesan initiative that continues to serve as the framework for an evolving “pastoral plan” for the Diocese of Brooklyn. It is grounded in the hope that we will do all that is possible to sustain and enhance the vibrant parish life to which Jesus calls us. Three key realities: changing demographics, diminishing finances, and a decrease in the number of priests have affected the reality of the Catholic Church. The process will result in some parish closings, but ultimately will result in a stronger more vibrant Church.

3. How Many Parishes are being closed?

There is no list and no exact number, however, it is understood that some parishes will have to close. The migration patterns of Catholics throughout the two counties of the Diocese have left some areas under-served by the Church, while other areas which were previously, densely, populated by Catholics have changed. The purpose of *Christ Jesus, Our Hope* is to reflect prayerfully and evaluate the vitality of the Church in each area and to plan ways to sustain and strengthen the presence and pastoral care of the Church throughout the Diocese.

Where are parishes located that will close?

The exact locations of any closing is unknown, but each area of the Diocese will be affected by the consolidation of resources. At the same time, it is important that the Church be present in each area of the Diocese and that no area go without a Catholic presence.

4. Is the potential closing of parishes the result of the Diocese being in financial straits?

The finances of the Diocese have been greatly affected by the economic downturn and many of our parishes are also affected. All parishes have been asked to proceed with a sense of urgency to carefully evaluate their financial statuses and futures to avoid any crises. At the same time, other critical factors such as mass attendance, demographic changes, decreasing numbers of priests and the status of buildings are also considerations.

5. Isn't the Diocese wealthy?

Over the past few years the Diocese has actually been running a deficit of over \$8 million annually. Over the past two years the Diocese has taken extraordinary steps to address these budget shortfalls including staff reductions and agency budget cuts. While the Annual Catholic Appeal raises over \$10 million each year, this money is channeled to the many ministries which the Diocese operates such as Catholic Charities. The Diocese has also provided financial assistance to parishes in need. While many parishes do have real estate and savings, these assets belong to the people of the individual parish and are to be used for the good of the parishioners.

6. Can property be sold to raise money?

The Diocese itself owns only a few properties. Parish property exists for the good of the people of the parish and their posterity. Property can be leased to raise money, but there is great hesitation in selling property because once it is sold it is gone forever and will no longer be available for future generations.

7. Why can't we ask the Vatican for money?

Each Diocese is an individual entity. The church is not organized as a franchise system, but as a theological communion. The Vatican provides financial support to some missions throughout the world, but does not subsidize individual Dioceses. It is important to recognize that the US church accounts for only 7% of the Catholic world. Many nations, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, exist in drastic poverty and require missionary funding. The majority of the monies the Vatican takes in each year are used in these missionary endeavors, often leaving Vatican City at a break even point or even in a slight deficit.

8. Have the costs of the clergy abuse scandal affected diocesan finances and precipitated potential closings?

The Diocese of Brooklyn has addressed and continues to address these sensitive issues and challenges. Diocesan funds have been spent for compensation, treatment, background checks and legal fees. The total amount that the Diocese has paid is approximately \$12 million to date. Half of the total amount was covered by insurance. The remainder was paid for by the Diocesan central fund. These expenses have affected the finances of the Diocese but are not significant enough in themselves to affect the closing of parishes. In addition, it is important to note that even if parishes are closed, all of the assets of that

parish are legally bound to follow the parishioners. Assets of a parish are used to support the mission of the parish and cannot be assumed by the Diocese for another purpose.

9. How does the clergy shortage fit into the process?

The number of available priests to serve the churches of the Diocese is declining, however, it should be noted that except for very few examples, vocations to ministry in all religious denominations have been on the decline. The Diocese of Brooklyn is blessed with many fine priests called to serve the People of God. The distribution of these priests among parishes is an important consideration but not the sole factor used to keep parishes open or closed. The assignments of priests and deacons will be considered so that there is sufficient clergy in all areas to serve the needs of parishioners.

10. Our parish is poor. Are we abandoning the Gospel mission to serve the poor by targeting parishes who can't pay their bills?

The Church's mission is to the poor and the poor must never be abandoned. The Diocese has a responsibility to ensure that church is present most especially in poorer neighborhoods of our city. At the same time, the Diocese must also ensure that the structures which she maintains are financial solvent and stable so that the parishioners can be assured that the church will remain a force within the community for decades to come. This process will create changes in the current structures of the church, but will also ensure that structures remain or are created in all areas of our Diocese.

11. When will we know what will happen to our Church?

The Bishop will be making decisions regarding parishes mergers and closures in September 2010 after the parishes have submitted their feedback and the Diocesan commission has provided their recommendations.

12. What does this process have to do with me? What can I do?

All parishioners are asked first to pray for the Bishop and all those involved in the process. It is only through prayer that we will find direction and consolation. Additionally, parishioners are invited to learn about their parish and the state of the Diocese. Information will be provided to all parishioners and an opportunity for feedback will also be provided. When decisions are made, parishioners are encouraged to learn about the decisions and again, pray for all those affected. If your parish is affected, resources will be provided to help all involved understand and adapt to any changes.